



Northern Rockies Fire Management Strategic Plan for the 2005 Fire Season

June 1, 2005

Introduction:

This Strategic Plan is tiered to the Federal Fire and Aviation Operations 2005 Action Plan. Geographic Area emphasis will continue to be on Initial and Extended Attack incidents. Close management oversight is required on all emerging fires.

Situation Assessment -- refer to Appendix 1 (separate document): the updated Northern Rockies Preliminary 2005 Seasonal Wildland Fire Assessment, June 1, 2005.

Bottom line: Expect an active mid-July through August fire season mainly in the mountains of western Montana and northern Idaho.

Spring rains in April and May have increased large fuel moisture values in all areas especially across central and southern Montana with normal to above normal values. This will result in the growth of fine fuels that would aid in burning grasslands by summer. Current computer modeling indicates a normal fire season for the Northern Rockies. Normal drying of fuels would be expected to begin in mid-July and continuing to dry through August, leading to the potential for an active forest fire season with large fires, especially in northern Idaho and western Montana. If fall moisture conditions are normal, the season tends to wind down by mid-September. Once grasses are dried by curing naturally or by freezing this fall, the fire potential would increase for the grasslands of central and eastern Montana as well as North Dakota due to fall and early winter strong wind events.

Fuels Conditions:

Eastern Montana /North Dakota

- 7th consecutive year of drought resulting in live fuels showing signs of significant stress
- Mountain pine beetle, Spruce budworm, and Douglas-fir bark beetle outbreak increasing and expecting to expand
- 1000-hour fuels 15-25%

Western Montana

- 7th consecutive year of drought resulting in moderate soil moistures, with live fuels showing signs of significant stress
- 1000-hour fuels 19-26%
- Mountain pine beetle, spruce budworm, and Douglas-fir bark beetle outbreak increasing and expecting to expand

North Idaho

- 7th consecutive year of drought; conditions less pronounced than remainder of Geographic Area
- 1000-hour fuels 19-26%
- Near record low snowpack
- Insect and disease related tree mortality increasing and expecting to expand

Historical Perspective

Historically the peak fire season in the Northern Rockies begins mid-July and runs thru mid-October, however, during drought years, large fire activity can begin as early as April and run thru late fall. Fire activity typically spreads from east to west and from lower elevations to higher elevations across the Geographic Area. The 2005 fire season is in the 7th year of moderate to severe drought.

During the 2004-2005 fall/winter, the 1000-hour fuels were extremely dry, and with normal conditional forecast for the spring rains. This has allowed the larger fuels to become wet, taking us into mid-July before major fire problems occur. When the fine fuels cure, rapid fire growth, plume dominated, and extreme fire behavior will become more common, and resist our containment actions.

Resources and Preparedness

The Geographic Area expects to be at 95% of the production capabilities of Initial Attack resources during the peak fire season. The announcement to restore the large air tankers will help the Northern Rockies as we move into peak fire season. This together with additional severity resources will strengthen the Area's capability, as needed. The Northern Rockies agencies will coordinate severity requests to add additional resources to meet severe conditions.

Safe and aggressive Initial Attack is the key for keeping burned acreage and resource losses to a minimum.

Primary resources for successful Initial Attack include the following:

- Fully staffed engine and Initial Attack modules
- Type II and III Helicopters
- Smokejumpers – consider boosters during lightning events.
- Large Air Tankers and Single-Engine Air Tankers (SEATS)
- Leadership (Type III, IV and V Incident Commanders)
- Type III Team capability planned in Zone Annual Operating Plans
- Type II IA Crews
- Appropriate staffing at Dispatch Centers
- Appropriate staffing at National and Regional caches
- Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) platform available

These resources will be tracked closely and managed wisely for the best results.

The Northern Rockies as part of National Mobilization needs to capitalize on opportunities to assist other Geographic Areas in their fire management and aviation needs. These responses will not only assist others but will hone our forces and assist with budget management issues.

Safety

1. Firefighter and public safety is our first priority and will not be compromised during the conduct of ground or air operations.
2. Assure that proper leadership is available and that these individuals are receiving appropriate rest. Provide additional leadership as production resources are added to the Units.
3. Provide critical safety management oversight and leadership. (e.g. ground safety specialist, aviation safety specialist and/or Fire Safety Assistance Teams).
4. Provide a strong sense of situational awareness for the safety of firefighters on the fire ground.
5. Increase and maintain a high level of Fire Management and Agency Administrator oversight on Initial Attack and Extended Attack incidents.
6. During the fire season, a large number of fire transitions from Initial Attack to Extended Attack are possible. Assure that all Fire Managers and Agency Administrators are providing the necessary oversight during transition.
7. Work – Rest Guidelines haven't changed. Managers need to manage the Work – Rest Guidelines and not let the Work – Rest Guidelines manage them especially in long term fire situations.
8. Firefighters need to be able to operate radios between narrow and wide bands.
9. Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones (LCES) remain a pivotal element for firefighter safety, and we continue to promote and develop these fundamentals;
 - Individual firefighters and line overhead must be able to relate LCES mitigations at all times while engaged in suppression and prescribed fire activities.
 - Pilots and flight crews will assist in the establishment and evaluation of LCES mitigations on the ground.
 - Line Officers must be fluent in quality LCES mitigations, and expect all firefighters to maintain quality LCES. Arranging field tours with experts to enhance their understanding of Lookouts, Communications, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones is very desirable.

Leadership

1. Activate the Geographic Area Multi-Agency Coordination Group (MAC): (1) When large fire management activities begin to compete for scarce resources and or (2) where the Geographic Area moves into Preparedness Level 4. Pursue representation from State emergency service agencies, local law enforcement and State Fire Chief's association to coordinate community protection issues.
2. When the NR MAC is mobilized, conduct an in-person Agency Administrator (Regional Forester, State Forester, BLM State Director, etc.) briefing and gain buyoff and confirmation from the administrators on the authorities of the MAC group and established priorities for large fires. Assure that Agency Administrators understand the MAC incident prioritization and resource allocation process (figure 2, and Appendix 2).
3. Request additional leadership and support to assure coverage and proper rest for Fire Managers, Aviation personnel and Agency Administrators.
4. Utilize Zone MAC Groups to coordinate activities and collaborate on fire management issues at a more local level. These MAC Groups can provide prioritization within their sub-geographic areas thereby assisting the Geographic MAC.
5. Maintain open lines of communication and liaison between NR MAC, National Guard leaders, Fish and Wildlife Officials & Utilities Companies. Involve liaison to MAC groups as appropriate.
6. Require performance evaluations on all private fire service contractor resources. Submit a copy of the evaluations to NRCC.

Initial Attack/Operations

1. Initial Attack and Extended Attack will be the priority in the Northern Rockies. Develop and follow zone draw down plans that maintain Initial Attack capabilities and leadership at Preparedness Levels 3 thru 5. Replace Initial Attack resources committed to large incidents as quickly as possible.
2. Consider using Type I resources (i.e. Hotshot Crews, Smokejumpers) on Initial Attack and emerging Extended Attack fires.
3. Implement trigger points for moving additional resources and management infrastructure into the Geographic Area (figures 1 and 3) before the resources within the Northern Rockies Area are over-committed. Pre-positioning of resources is a key to success (figure 3).
4. At Preparedness Level 5 establish a Type 3 "ready-reserve" of resources from each zone that is capable of rapid deployment to an area with Initial Attack and Extended Attack needs.
5. Maximize the use of smokejumper resources assigned to the Area.
6. At Preparedness Level 4, units will be prepared to hire and train AD and EFF crews, local volunteer fire department personnel and private fire service contractors to meet local and, as appropriate, National needs.
7. When faced with multiple initial attack situations, prioritize operations into high value vs. lower value responses.

Aviation

1. Mobilize additional Single Engine Air Tanker Bases within the Geographic Area and move them according to need. Plan to staff each base with 2 SEAT aircraft and appropriate management and leadership.
2. Mobilize additional aviation resources for Initial Attack with severity funds as conditions worsen. In addition, aerial supervision and leadership should be increased as additional aviation assets are added.
3. To ensure effective and efficient suppression efforts, if conditions warrant, do not hesitate to launch aviation resources on first report of a confirmed smoke, as the window for suppression of new fires will be very small with the current drought and resulting fuel conditions.
4. Utilize Exclusive Use helicopters within the Geographic Area – (Currently planned numbers include: 2 Type 1 and 5 Type 2. Beginning July 1, additional Call When Needed (CWN) helicopters will be available – planned numbers: 2 Type 1, 7 Type 2 and 17 Type 3)
5. Preposition Air Tactical Group Supervisor (ATGS) platforms as needed.
6. Encourage early detection flights and increase flights to twice daily at PL Levels 4 and 5.
7. Evaluate the use of MAFFS aircraft to supplement aviation resources at Great Falls, Helena, Billings and Spokane.
8. Evaluate 2-4 CL-215/415 for use at Coeur d'Alene, Helena, Lewistown and Kalispell as the season progresses.

Logistics and Mobilization

1. Develop staging and mobilization centers, as needed, to support fire activities.
2. Out-of-Area Type 1 and Type 2 Incident Management Teams may be staged in strategic locations. Staged teams will go to the top of the rotation and after 72 hours of staging the need for these teams will be reevaluated.
3. Provide for a comprehensive briefing for resources coming into the Northern Rockies from outside the Area.
4. Rotate out-of-Area resources and management infrastructure into the Northern Rockies to keep Area resources rested and fresh.
5. National and regional caches staffed and stocked at appropriate levels. Contingency plans in place for regional coverage in the event of multiple unrelated emergency response situations.

Planning and Coordination

1. Assign a Long Term Fire Behavior Analyst when the Incident Support Organization is working with MAC. Review the WFSA and request incidents to update the WFSA where there are insufficient resources to accomplish the selected alternative. Assign a Planning Section to the MAC Group and develop a daily Geographic Area Action Plan.
2. The WFSA should consider a minimal action alternative.
3. Establish regular agency administrator/fire management conference calls. Recommend weekly at Preparedness Level 3 and 4, and daily at Preparedness Level 5, or when fire activity dictates.
4. At Preparedness Level 4 and 5, establish daily NRCG MAC conference calls that will include Zone-MAC, Area Command and Incident Commander.
5. Utilize Zone Mobilization Boards, which include Fire Department and Private Contractor representation at Preparedness Level 4 and 5 to assist Dispatch Centers in efficient and maximized use of all Zone resources.

Fire Prevention and Information

1. During the spring, utilize fire prevention personnel, media contacts, and interagency partners to stress fire prevention and awareness.
2. When multiple human-caused fires being to occur, evaluate the need to mobilize Geographic and National Fire Prevention Teams to work with the public and local communities. Assure that there is strong communication between these teams, Agency Administrators, State and County authorities, and Incident Management Teams.
3. As activity increases, recommend assigning a media contact to the Incident Support Organization.
4. Address and coordinate fire restrictions and closure processes preseason. Establish a Geographical Restrictions Coordinator to work with the area interagency partners and state Governor Offices.
5. Coordinate the need for large scale closures, as appropriate.

Fire Business Management

1. Cost accountability will be evaluated on all incidents to provide safe, cost effective suppression of the incident (Appendix 3).
2. Agency Administrators will provide financial over-site. They must maintain a daily dialog with Incident Management Teams and fire management officers during the decision-making process and give clear direction concerning containing suppression costs.
3. The WFSA will include the least cost alternative.
4. A suppression cost objective will be included as an incident objective in the Delegation of Authority to Incident Commanders.
5. Cost-effective management of resources will be monitored at the geographic level and areas of concern will be brought to the attention of Agency Administrators.
6. Adhere to "Large Fire Cost Reduction Action Plan" March 2003.
7. Agency Administrators should utilize Incident Business Advisors (IBAs) as appropriate to assist with cost management. Assign an IBA for any fire projected suppression costs of >\$1 million.
8. Pre-identify Financial Support and Business Management modules to assist local units as needed.
9. Pilot test the use of Contracting Officer Technical Representatives (COTRs) in the Northern Rockies to assist agency administrators and teams in the management of contract resources.
10. Agency Administrator will provide over-site for Cost Share Agreements to ensure a fair and equitable disbursement of costs.

Priorities

Wildland Fire Priorities

When multiple large fires are occurring and resources become scarce, prioritization becomes critical. When a Multi-Agency Coordinating Group is established consider using the following priorities when allocating scarce equipment and personnel:

1. Firefighter and public safety
2. Initial Attack
3. Emerging Incidents (Type 3)
4. Community Protection
5. Critical Infrastructure (i.e. Utilities)
5. Threats to Other Structures and Improvements
6. Natural Resource Protection
7. BAER Project Support

Prescribed Fire/Wildland Fire Use Priorities

1. High priority for resource commitment will be given to prescribed fire use and wildland fire use throughout the fire season.
2. At Preparedness Level 4 and 5, follow the established protocol in the National Mobilization Guide.

All Risk Priority

Agencies will be requested to respond to non-fire emergencies. On a case-by-case basis, this will have to be evaluated in accordance with State and Federal law.

1. National security
2. Protection of life
3. Protection of property
4. Protection of natural resources

Figure 1

Example of a Normal Northern Rockies Staffing Preparedness Scenario

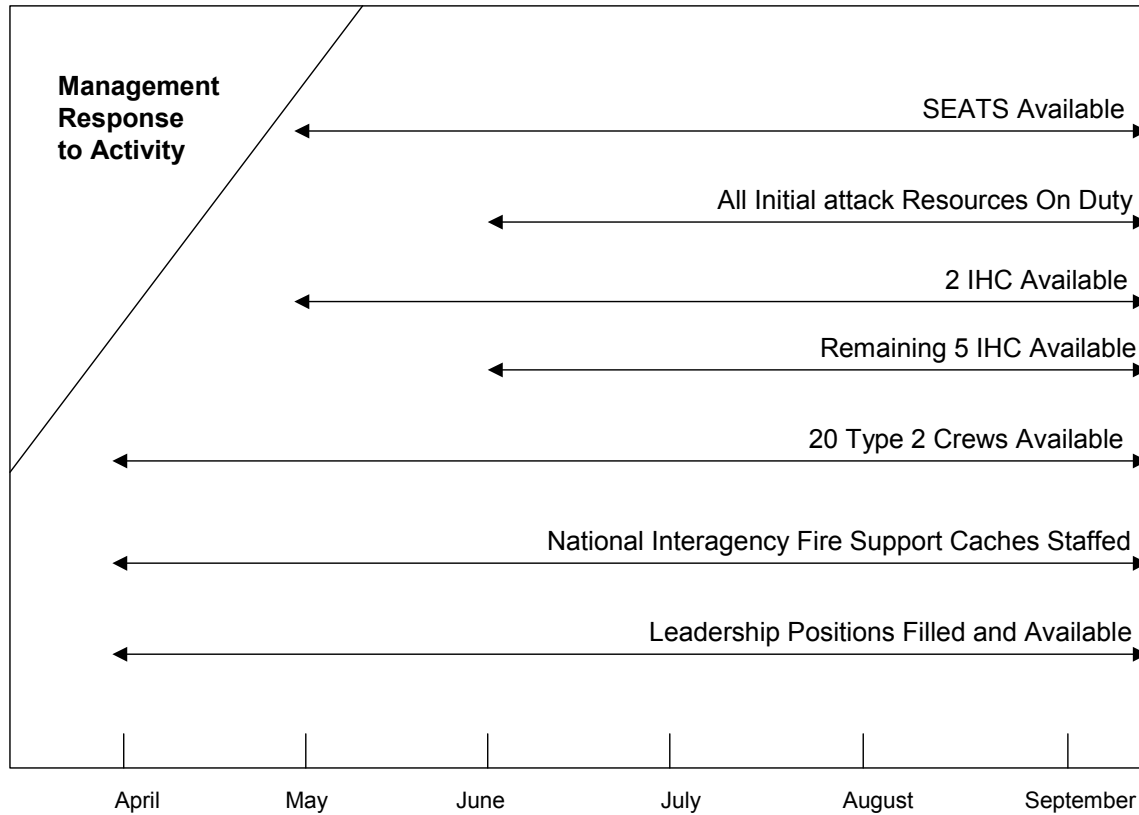


Figure 2
Incident Priority Setting Flowchart

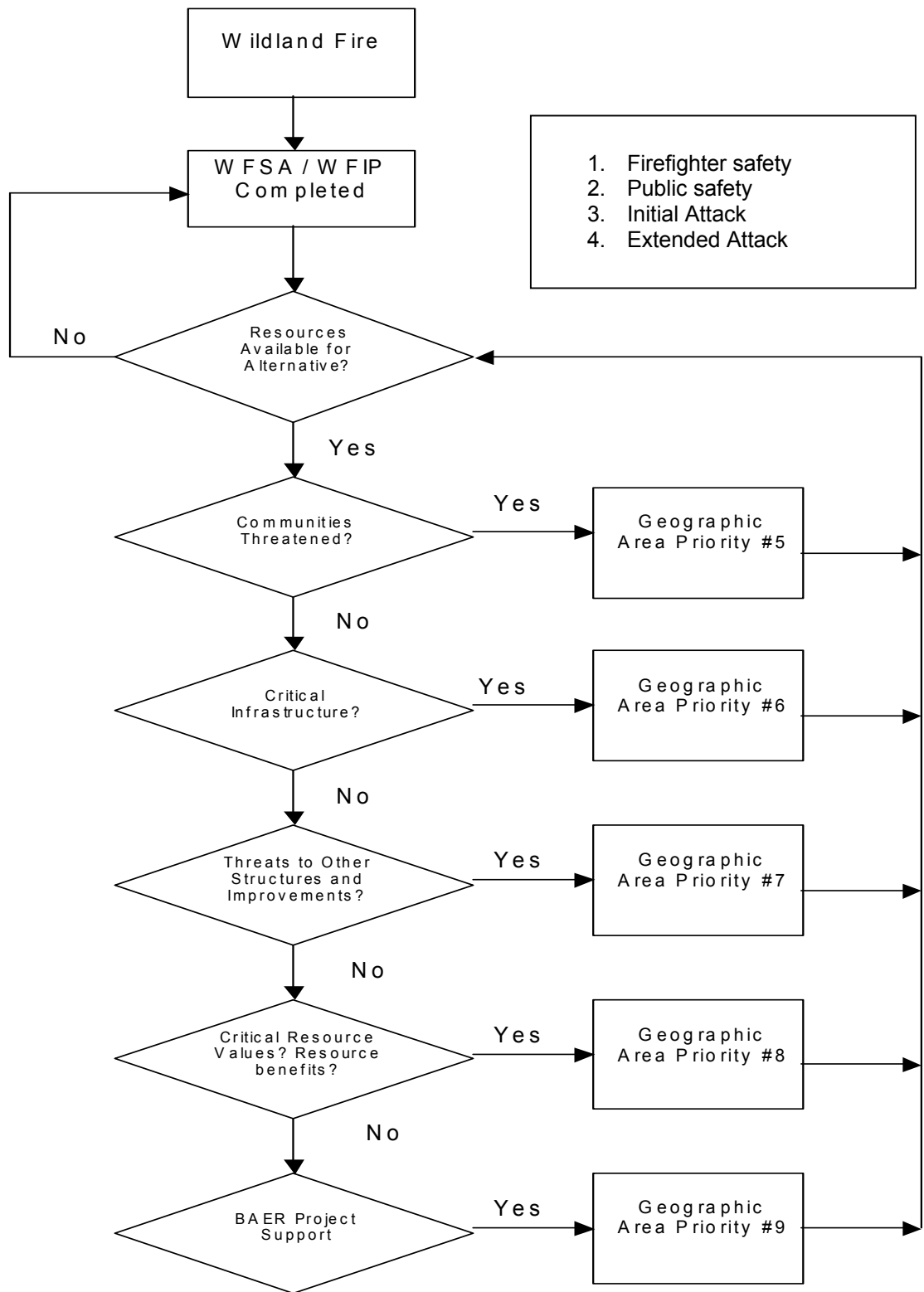


Figure 3: Trigger Points

Trigger Point Event	Days before event	Actions to be considered
Red Flag Wind Event for a specific area.	1-3	Move additional aviation resources and Type 1 Crews into the area. Extend IA, Fire Prevention, and Leadership staffing to cover early morning and evening hours. Use fire prevention teams and the media to minimize risk of new starts. Consider emergency closures or restrictions.
Lightning Event; one or more areas.	1-3	Move additional aviation resources, IA Crews and Smokejumpers into the area affected. Utilize Type III organizations to manage large numbers of new fire starts. Plan for early morning staffing of IA resources and early detection flights.
Hunting Seasons and Holidays; increased human caused fire risk, above normal.	3-5	Assign National or Geographic Fire Prevention Teams to assist local units in getting out the message of the current conditions. Consider additional fire restrictions or closures. Extend IA resource staffing in the evening. Move additional resources into the area affected. This, in most cases, will be from outside the Geographic Area.
Recurring Arson Events	now	Move additional aviation resources and Type 1 Crews into the area. Extend IA, Fire Prevention, and Leadership staffing to cover early morning and evening hours. Since it is most likely that these fires will be roadside starts, emphasize the use of engines. Work with LE and Fire Prevention Teams / Specialists to develop a plan for addressing this arson activity.

Appendix 1 – (see separate document titled “Preliminary 2005 Seasonal Wildland Fire Assessment Northern Rockies Geographic Area, June 1, 2005” – linked on the Northern Rockies website: http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/fire/nrcc/PredictiveServices/Outlooks/seasonal_assment.pdf)

Appendix 2

MAC Roles and Responsibilities Table with Agency Administrators, Area Command and Incident Command Teams

	One Zone experiencing multiple incidents requiring resource allocation between units (no Area Command) (1)	One zone experiencing multiple incidents requiring resource allocation between incidents (Area Command in place) (2)	Two or more zones experiencing multiple incidents requiring resource allocation from outside the zone (3)	Two or more Geographic Areas experiencing multiple large incidents requiring national resource allocation
Zone Agency Administrators	Primary Oversight	Primary Oversight	Support as Needed	Support as Needed
Zone MAC	Primary Oversight	Support as Needed	Support as Needed	Support as Needed
Geographic Area Agency Administrators	Support as Needed	Support as Needed	Primary Oversight	Primary Oversight
Geographic Area MAC	Support as Needed	Support as Needed	Primary Oversight	Primary Oversight
National MAC	Support as Needed	Support as Needed	Support as Needed	Primary Oversight

- (1) Zone Agency Administrator activates Zone MAC and delegates authorities to Incident Management Teams. Zone Agency Administrators approves WFIP/WFSA.
- (2) Zone Agency Administrator changes delegation of authority to Area Command who in turn provides direction to Incident Command Teams under their authority. Zone Agency Administrators approves WFIP/WFSA.

Geographic Area Administrators activate Geographic Area MAC and delegates authorities to Geographic Area MAC. Geographic Area (GA) MAC provides geographic area objectives and priorities to Area Commands and Incident Management Teams. GA MAC is allocating or reallocating scarce resource between Area Commands and Incident Management Teams. Zone Administrators approve WFIP/WFSA. Geographic Area Administrators set priorities and allocate scarce and critical resources through Geographic Area MAC.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

	Preparedness Levels 1- 3	Preparedness Levels 4 and 5
State Governor	Works within legislative processes to fund essential state and local programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declares state emergencies/disasters Approves FEMA Declaration requests through State Forestry Requests Presidential disasters through Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) and FMAGA through State Forestry Approves State-wide closures Approves use of National Guard, declaration required Implements Fire Mobilization Plan (moves structural resources) through State Forestry
County Commissioners/ Supervisors/Mayors	Establish liaison with key partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilize county/local resources to support closure/evacuation needs. Assign Agency Administrators working with fire departments, sheriffs departments, etc. Declares a county/city emergency and/or requests Governor to declare State emergency
Geographic Area Agency Administrator (Regional Forester, State Forester, State Directors and ACO level)	Support Zone and unit activities for preparedness initial attack.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconcile political issues at state/federal levels Approve prioritization criteria for collection of responses to NRG MAC Approve geographic area protection objectives Delegates decision making to NRG MAC (for above) Coordinate closures and restrictions Reference Resource Allocation Table
Zone Level Agency Administrator (Forest Supervisor, Area Manager, Tribal, Pueblo and County Commissioner level)	Work with interagency partners for preparedness/initial attack preseason agreements and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconcile political issues at local levels (county, forest, area, etc.) Delegate authorities and oversees activities of ACs and IMTs (where 2 or more jurisdictions involved, unified command) Maintains open files of communications of NRG MAC, Zone MAC Reference Resource Allocation Table
Unit Level Agency Administrator (District Ranger, Unit Manager, Fire District Trustee)	Assure fire preparedness/initial attack activities and fire management plans are completed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconcile political issues at local level (community, district, etc.)
Area Command		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize based on NRG MAC objectives for 2 or more IMT's. Coordinate with all governmental entities Allocates resources between incidents Reconciles issues between 2 or more agency administrators Respond to NRG needs for redistribution of resources If appropriate, ensures that all IMT's operate with common strategy.
IMT (I, II, III)	II or III more likely than I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement specific strategy and tactics to meet agency administrator objectives for appropriate management response for incident(s) and other delegated responsibilities. Establish and prioritize criteria for redistribution of resources within NRG.
National MAC		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize & Mobilize Resources between Geographic Areas
Geographic Area MAC Board of Directors(e.g., Fire Director, State Fire Manager, President Fire Chief's Assoc., State Emergency Management)	Not usually active but should assure processes are established and understood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and prioritize criteria for allocation of resources Establish protection objectives Establish the need for additional training Establish reallocation controls when 2 or more AC's are assigned and multiple zones are affected Maintains open lines of communications with Zone MAC's & AA's Assess need for Geographic Area Prevention Team Assess need for Geographic Area Public Information Team Reference resource allocation table
Zone MACs Zone Board of Directors (e.g., Forest FMO, Area Fire Manager, County Fire Chief)	Not usually active but should assure processes are established and understood. Assure Zone Mobilization Board (private, local, state, federal) are coordinating with Zone Dispatch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same as above/different in scope. Serve Agency Administrator needs for coordination for fire management coordination issues within the Zone. Ensure that NRG MAC criteria and objectives are carried out at Zone level. Monitor and ensure initial attack capability Assess need for Zone level prevention team Assess need for Zone level Public Information Unit Reference resource allocation table Activate Zone Mobilization Boards (Govt. & Private Sector)

Appendix 3

Large Fire Cost Tickler List

- Emphasize the use of Prescribed Fire and Fire use. Treat large areas of mosaics to help create areas of reduced fire intensity.
- Fund preparedness resources to maintain an efficient Initial Attack organization.
- Prioritize suppression objectives. When resources are short concentrate on protecting life and values at risk. De-emphasize perimeter control.
- Maintain a daily dialog between IMT, FMO and Agency Administrator.
- Consider managing a fire at a lower complexity level. Use more Type 3 organizations and manage complexity.
- Staff the fire where the fire will threaten suppression objectives - guerrilla tactics.
- Use FARSITE and other tools to move resources to areas that threaten control objectives. Un-staff those sections of line where the threat is several burning periods away.
- Better manage the risk associated with implementing less than full suppression on all divisions at all times. Reward good decisions and risk taking.
- No incentive to hit a fire hard as we always have a safety net. Initial and Extended Attack is the key to large fire costs.
- A lot of our tactics are not working in the current drought situation. We need to change tactics and strategies. Choose “the best ridge”, not “the next ridge”.
- Regional oversight of the WFSA and team delegation. Are teams doomed to fail by being asked to accomplish objectives that are unobtainable or unrealistic?
- Consider the best tools for the job. Equipment, use, water handling and night operations.
- WFSA is the key. Need to consider the “least cost alternative”.
- Better predictive services tools – when is the season going to end? Will help us in our risk assessment.
- Reevaluate the WFSA to more clearly show cost decisions and the weight given to them.
- Better manage, at the geographic level, high cost resources.
- Quickly demob ineffective contract resources accomplish through the dispatching of COTR's to assist the IMT.
- Better manage aviation resources. Use on Initial Attack and Extended Attack fires. Minimize use on large and mega fires. Demob if not needed.
- Consider cost when prioritizing the release of resources.
- Minimize the use of motels and other travel costs when mobilizing resources.
- Use more spike camps to reduce travel and aviation time.
- Minimize the holding of resources on incidents for “what if?” situations.
- Complete Unit Fire Management Plans so appropriate suppression responses and fire use can be implemented where appropriate.
- Evaluate the need for expensive equipment and support on incidents. Release these resources.
- Better manage supply requests.
- Better manage re-supply request (See supplement to Chapter 30).
- Better educate line personnel on the use of available equipment (forwarders, skidders, excavators, skidgens, dozers, clippers, masticators, etc.).
- Monitor use of specialized equipment, demobilization or remove from pay status when not needed.
- Limit the amount of equipment in staging; take some risk.
- Question name requests when local resources are available.
- Discussion with AA to supply home unit resources.
- Increase intermediate supervision (strike team/ task force leaders).
- Improve coordination and management of resources on multi-team incidents to prevent hording of resources.

- Consider the extension of personnel assigned to 21 days when fatigue can be managed and costs will be lowered.
- Teams and Dispatch manage the use/need of rental vehicles.
- Agency Cell Phones (provide by home unit) and personal cell phone costs should not be reimbursed, exceptions may apply but must be document and approved by the Incident Agency Administrator.
- Work with municipalities in developing/establishing fuel breaks.
- Monitor suppression resources on large fires to assess degree to which they are productively engaged. Minimize number of resources held in reserve not being engaged.
- Define criteria during which suppression responses would occur (time of year; expected weather changes).
- Maintain liaison with National MAC as situation warrants.
- Maintain liaison with Regional HLS/FEMA as situation warrants.

